1. Human Capital

Workforce, education, health, childcare, and population capacity

- Childcare affordability, availability, and provider sustainability
- Childcare closures due to regulation and enforcement
- State childcare licensing as a barrier
- All-day preschool and kindergarten impacts on childcare viability
- Subsidies for childcare providers
- Childcare for Ridgewater students / college-based childcare
- Affordable housing and childcare for students
- Workforce development
- Stackable certifications
- Customized training and workforce training
- Paid and unpaid internships in small communities
- College as a regional economic development resource
- Increasing visibility of the college as an asset
- Ag-focused education
- Funding for CTE classes in smaller schools
- Dropping school enrollments
- Navigating education and college systems
- Resident recruitment (workforce attraction)
- Workforce housing challenges
- Graduating vs. incoming student gaps (Eden Valley–Watkins)
- Mental health as the #1 community health issue
- Access to mental health services (juvenile, adult, seniors, geriatric)
- Mental health transportation barriers
- Chemical dependency support and prevention
- Suicide response teams (Loss Teams)
- Community health collaboration
- Access to affordable healthcare
- Healthcare workforce concerns (rural practice, staffing, part-time physicians)
- Telemedicine clinics (stopgap)
- Social drivers of health (housing, food, transportation)
- Food Rx / Food as Medicine programs

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2. Foundational Assets

Infrastructure, housing stock, utilities, transportation, and physical systems

- Housing affordability
- Cost of developing housing passed to residents
- Condemned and degrading housing stock
- Absentee landlords
- Programs to upgrade housing stock
- Free-market housing solutions
- Property tax relief as a housing cost tool
- Affordable housing based on prevailing wages
- Workforce housing supply constraints

- Student housing coordination (Ridgewater)
- Broadband access and affordability
- Energy costs (petroleum, ethanol, electric infrastructure)
- Renewable energy (geothermal, nuclear, fusion)
- Renewable energy rate stabilization
- Transportation infrastructure
- Roads blocked by rail access issues
- Road wear from heavy ag and equipment traffic
- Emergency medical access and response
- Emergency response vehicles shortages
- Charging infrastructure and affordability (EVs)
- Telemedicine as infrastructure support
- Trails and "safe routes to school"
- Trees / ash borer mitigation gaps
- Repurposing underutilized residential, commercial, and industrial real estate

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3. Community Resources

Public services, quality of life, collaboration, nonprofits, and civic capacity

- Overloaded social and human service infrastructure
- Creating partnerships and shared "tables" for solutions
- Coordinating existing services more efficiently
- Nonprofit sector training and participation
- Administration capacity to coordinate funding streams
- Law enforcement involvement in mental health response
- Transportation for vulnerable populations
- Night transportation gaps for behavioral health
- Food insecurity initiatives
- SHIP grant food access via transportation
- Support for local farmers
- Climate-smart food grants
- Community health surveys and data collection
- Concerns about survey design and outreach
- Broadly purposed community amenities
- Strategic planning for mobility and disability access
- Utilize existing services more efficiently
- Gratitude and recognition of community partners
- Sense of place and community appreciation (Willmar Lakes Area)

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4. Economic Competitiveness

Business climate, industry growth, site readiness, entrepreneurship, and cost structure

- Surviving vs. thriving under rising cost of living
- Wage vs. housing affordability dynamics
- Opportunity to build household wealth

- Shovel-ready business sites (60–70k sq. ft.)
- Rent-ready business infrastructure
- Business growth
- Incubators and entrepreneur support
- Artist lofts (creative economy)
- Resident recruitment tied to jobs
- 3–5 businesses considering locating in Kandiyohi County
- Energy cost competitiveness
- Affordable infrastructure supporting business operations
- Notifying businesses of road closures and construction
- Support for entrepreneurs (RLF, SBDC, banks)
- College as an economic development engine
- Healthcare and housing reputation impacts on recruitment
- Taxes and affordability relative to services
- Forward-looking, next-generation economic focus

Notes for CEDS / DevelopMN Alignment

- **Housing and childcare** are cross-cutting issues that affect *all four* categories; placement reflects dominant impact rather than exclusivity.
- **Mental health and healthcare** function as both Human Capital and Community Resources, but were weighted toward workforce capacity and population stability.
- **Energy and broadband** are treated as Foundational Assets due to their enabling role across sectors.

1. Human Capital

Workforce, education, health, and population capacity

Strengths

- Presence of regional higher education and training institutions positioned as workforce partners
- Existing customized training, CTE, and stackable credential models
- Strong awareness of mental health, chemical dependency, and social drivers of health
- Active community health surveys and data collection cycles
- Recognition of childcare and housing as foundational workforce supports

Weaknesses

- Acute childcare shortages, closures, and regulatory barriers
- Mental health service capacity gaps across all age groups
- Transportation barriers limiting access to healthcare, education, and employment
- Declining school enrollments and uneven education pipelines
- Complexity of navigating education, credentials, and career pathways

- Rural healthcare staffing challenges and declining provider reputation

Opportunities

- Expansion of childcare solutions tied to colleges, employers, and licensing reform
- Alignment of education, workforce training, and employer needs
- Increased use of telemedicine and hybrid service models
- Paid internships and local experiential learning to retain young talent
- Reframing colleges as visible, regional economic development assets
- Integration of health, housing, and workforce strategies

Threats

- Continued workforce outmigration due to housing, childcare, and healthcare gaps
- Burnout and attrition among healthcare and childcare providers
- Regulatory environments that discourage service providers and educators
- Long-term population decline reducing labor force availability
- Inability to compete with metro areas for skilled workers

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2. Foundational Assets

Infrastructure, housing, utilities, transportation, and physical systems

Strengths

- Recognition of broadband as a critical utility, with effective regional partners
- Existing housing stock that could be rehabilitated or repurposed
- Strong awareness of infrastructure barriers affecting daily life and emergency response
- Emerging interest in renewable energy and long-term cost stabilization
- Community interest in trails, accessibility, and mobility planning

Weaknesses

- Housing affordability crisis driven by construction costs and taxes
- Degrading, vacant, and condemned housing stock
- Insufficient workforce and student housing supply
- Transportation bottlenecks affecting emergency access
- Aging infrastructure subject to heavy agricultural and industrial wear

- Limited mitigation planning for environmental risks (e.g., ash borer)

Opportunities

- Housing rehabilitation and reinvestment programs
- Strategic repurposing of underutilized residential, commercial, and industrial properties
- Renewable energy projects that reduce long-term cost volatility
- EV charging and future-oriented transportation infrastructure
- Integrated infrastructure planning linking housing, transportation, and services

Threats

- Rising construction, energy, and maintenance costs
- Continued deterioration of housing and infrastructure without intervention
- Infrastructure failures impacting safety, health, and business operations
- Delays or underinvestment in broadband, roads, and utilities
- Climate and environmental stressors increasing long-term costs

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3. Community Resources

Public services, nonprofit capacity, collaboration, and quality of life

Strengths

- Strong nonprofit and community-based organization presence
- Culture of collaboration and cross-sector dialogue
- Existing food access, health, and prevention programs
- High community awareness of equity, access, and social needs
- Dedicated local leadership and engaged service providers

Weaknesses

- Overloaded social and human service systems
- Fragmented service delivery and limited coordination capacity
- Transportation gaps for vulnerable populations
- Insufficient administrative capacity to manage complex funding streams
- Survey fatigue and limited public understanding of planning topics

Opportunities

- Better coordination and systemization of existing services
- Shared-use facilities and broadly purposed community amenities
- Expanded food access initiatives tied to health and transportation
- Improved data transparency and public engagement
- Strengthening nonprofit workforce training and sustainability

Threats

- Growing demand outpacing service capacity
- Funding volatility for nonprofit and public programs
- Burnout among service providers and volunteers
- Equity gaps widening if access issues persist
- Loss of trust if coordination and communication do not improve

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4. Economic Competitiveness

Business climate, entrepreneurship, industry growth, and cost structure

Strengths

- Interest from new businesses considering local expansion
- Availability of shovel-ready and rent-ready industrial space concepts
- Entrepreneurial support infrastructure (RLFs, SBDCs, lenders)
- Strong agricultural base and emerging creative economy assets
- Recognition of energy and infrastructure costs as competitive factors

Weaknesses

- Cost-of-living pressures undermining workforce stability
- Housing and childcare constraints limiting business attraction
- Infrastructure disruptions affecting business operations
- Dependence on external labor pools due to local shortages
- Limited visibility of local economic assets outside the region

Opportunities

- Business attraction tied to site readiness and workforce alignment
- Incubators, artist lofts, and creative placemaking strategies

- Energy cost stabilization as a long-term competitive advantage
- Stronger integration between education institutions and employers
- Resident recruitment strategies tied to quality of life and affordability

Threats

- Inability to compete with larger regions on wages and amenities
- Rising operational costs reducing business viability
- Workforce shortages slowing expansion or deterring investment
- Perception issues related to healthcare, housing, and infrastructure
- Economic leakage if residents work or spend outside the region